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Books

A traffic of spies

SPY TRADE

By E. H. Cookridge.
Hodder and Stoughton. 288 pages.
£2.50.

GHELEN: SPY OF THE CENTURY

By E. H. Cookridge.
Hodder and Stoughton. 424 pages.
£3.75.

The beauty of spies is in the eye of the beholder. Mine are fine, until they get caught. Yours are blackguards; or so, at least, governments and spy trial judges conventionally pretend. In the eyes of most of us spies are remote outsiders, though worth a second glance should you ever surely recognise one. And Mr Cookridge observes in the opening chapter of "Spy Trade" that it is not only the richly ornamental spy of fiction who excites pleasurable curiosity.

How it happens that many a "real life" spy has been able to turn profitable publicist instead of having to languish in jail for as long as his captors had originally intended he should, is amply explained in "Spy Trade." The author discusses over a score of postwar cases of governments bartering captive foreign agents against their own incarcerated men. For in the end, it seems, no government is quite so beastly as to disown altogether a man who has supplied it with valuable intelligence; however disreputable he may have been made to look subsequently.

A delicate matter in these exchanges is the comparative worth of the hostages available. When equally big fish are not at hand several small fry have the good luck to be thrown in to balance the scales. Mr Cookridge devotes seven of his 21 chapters to the intricate circumstances in which Moscow exploited the windfall of Mr Gary Powers and the U-2 shot down over Siberia to effect the release in February, 1962, of Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, the highly competent Soviet spy in the United States, who had been sent to prison for 30 years. Among other comparable cases considered by the author are those of Messrs Greville Wynne and Gordon



Gehlen (left) in Nazi days

Lonsdale, the Krogers and Mr Gerald Brooke, and Mr Alfred Frenzel, (a mealtime-minded Bundestag deputy who had sold defence secrets to the Warsaw Pact countries) and the comparatively insignificant west German archaeologist, Frau Martina Kischke. The book is aptly illustrated with 40 photographs.

Like the rest of us, spies are mostly weird birds, variously impelled by the exigencies not only of mating, feeding and drinking (preferably the hard stuff) but also by patriotism, religious or political belief, some personal grievance against society, or, above all, by the desire to be somebody different and important. Even the fabulously competent and studiously aloof General Gehlen displays in his recently published autobiography an undignified itch to play to the gallery, not merely for the lolly that a knowledgeable agent (literary) can rake from the international market but also for personal vindication in the face of latter-day disparagement.

Mr Cookridge, perhaps in deference to his publishers, calls his other book "Gehlen: Spy of the Century." But in fact Reinhard Gehlen himself never crossed a frontier to spy out the nakedness of the land of military apparel. General Gehlen controlled a far-reaching network of agents and shrewdly fitted their bits and pieces of information into a coherent picture. In Berlin, during the second world war, he was the organiser and

co-ordinator of intelligence for the Wehrmacht on the eastern front. (It was not his fault that Hitler disregarded unpleasant news.) In Bavaria, after the war, Gehlen put his experience and knowledge at the disposal of the west, first the United States, and then the Federal German Republic. As head of the Federal Intelligence Service he tapped sources of invaluable information from the rival east German Democratic Republic, especially in the days when it was expanding much of its "People's Police" into a "People's Army" tutored by Soviet officers. In March, 1968, Gehlen was the first to predict, on the strength of contacts in the Soviet Union, that Moscow would displace the Dubcek regime in Prague by force. Eventually he came in for heavy public criticism for high-handed ways and indiscriminating choice of staff, including some former SS officers and such costly double agents as Heinz Felfel.

It is in all a fascinating story and Mr Cookridge tells it well. The text is adequately documented. But there are a few mildly irritating mistakes. Herr Brandt, for instance, spells his first name Willy not Willi. And there cannot have been a rendezvous at Milestone 107 on the autobahn; there are only kilometre posts.

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